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Food & Nutrition

STA/STA

August 1980 Volume 10 Number 4

"Help Us Help Ourselves"

Native Americans want to be more involved in solving their own food and nutrition problems. A conference held this spring may be one step toward accomplishing this goal. **Page 2**

Reservations Begin Their Own Food Distribution Programs

Indian reservations can now operate the Food Distribution Program themselves. This means the entire process — from certifying applicants to distributing USDA foods — can take place on the reservation. **Page 4**

Ute Mountain Indians provide food help with dignity and autonomy.

Residents of White Earth and Leech Lake welcome added choice and convenience.

Families learn to supplement and add variety to their diets.

You and Nutrients

If you work with kids or families who want to learn more about food, you may be able to use this 4-page excerpt from the 1979 Yearbook of Agriculture. It's all about nutrients and how our bodies use them.

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"Help Us Help

"Help us help ourselves." That's what many Native Americans*, or First Americans as some prefer to be called, say when they talk about government aid. Their message reflects deep-rooted feelings of pride and self-reliance. Native Americans have a long history of fending for themselves—a spirit that carries over when they participate in food and nutrition programs. Simply put, they want to be more involved in solving their own health and nutrition problems.

The problems are significant. Today, there are approximately 1 million Native Americans living in the United States. About half live on reservations in remote areas of the country, and their isolation makes purchasing food a difficult task. Moreover, the harsh climate, high unemployment, poor land, and inadequate housing they face daily all have a great impact on their health and nutritional status. Early death, high infant mortality, malnutrition, diabetes, obesity, and alcoholism are often problems among Native Americans.

Patterns and needs vary

Solving these problems is difficult because Native Americans comprise a wide variety of groups, each with distinct cultural patterns. The food habits and nutritional practices of each group vary from region to region, as do their physiological, sociological, and psychological needs. Therefore, planning one uniform food assistance program around the needs of all groups is challenging.

Some Native Americans argue that because of their unique circumstances and special needs, they

should manage their own food programs and have a strong voice in forming policy for those programs. In the past this issue, as well as other issues concerning self-determination, has sometimes led to costly court contests between some Native American organizations and the Federal government.

Today, a number of food programs are under tribal control. Currently, approximately 28 tribes operate the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). New Federal regulations also now allow recognized tribal organizations to choose whether or not to run their own food distribution programs, and, under special circumstances, their own food stamp programs. And, where reservations have both programs, each participating household can choose either program.

Still, there are some people who feel that tribal control of programs isn't progressing fast enough. They want Native American groups to have a stronger voice when it comes to formulating policy for those programs.

"Given the resources, Native Americans are proving themselves more and more capable of running their own programs. They should have, at the very least, a more forceful voice in helping to form policy," says John Belindo, Director of the National Indian Food and Nutrition Resource Center (NIFNRC) in Denver, Colorado.

"Native Americans traditionally have had problems getting their voices heard by government," Belindo says. "I hope that government will be more responsive to their needs by working more closely with organizations representing Native Americans."

Conference held in March

In an effort to be more responsive, the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) co-sponsored a conference last March to examine its changing relationship with Native Americans participating in food assistance programs.

FNS cooperated with Colorado State University and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), an independent, nonprofit organization representing many tribes, in sponsoring the National Native American Food and Nutrition Policy Conference, March 24–26, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The main purpose of the conference, which was largely funded by the National Science Foundation, was to bring Native American tribal and community leaders together with scientists and government officials who research and administer food and nutrition programs. FNS helped provide funding to nine Native American organizations taking part in the conference.

Over 150 people, including representatives from more than 100 tribes, attended the conference. Representatives from the White House, the Food and Nutrition Service, the Indian Health Service, the Department of Health and Human Services, and USDA's Human Nutrition Center also were present.

Discussed key issues

Conference participants formed small work groups and seminars to discuss several issues, including:

- decreasing the high rates of diabetes among Native Americans;
- controlling alcoholism among Native Americans;
- improving the nutritional status of Native American elderly people;
- formulating policies to deal with family nutrition needs of Native Americans living on reservations and in urban areas;

**For the purposes of this article, the term "Native American" refers to all the original inhabitants of North America, including Indians, Alaskans, Aleuts, and Eskimos.*

Ourselves"

- defining a working relationship between scientists and Native Americans who are subjects of their research;

- developing general food and nutrition policy statements with the help and participation of Native Americans.

Reports on the conference indicate that participants considered it a start toward bridging the communication gap between Native American tribal organizations, scientists, and the Federal government. Generally, they were also optimistic about possibilities for future cooperation.

"For many years, studies on the health and nutrition of Native Americans were done by 'outsiders'—people who were not Native Americans and who usually didn't communicate their findings to tribal organizations," explains Joel Teitelbaum, FNS project coordinator for the conference. "This allowed no opportunity for Native Americans either to be aware of these findings or to discuss them. The conference sought to establish an ongoing discussion among all groups concerned."

Other participants agree with Teitelbaum.

"I've never seen this kind of interaction before," says John Belindo. "Any conference like this naturally encourages communication among the participating groups."

Groups found shared concerns

Alan Ackerman, a nutritionist at Colorado State University who coordinated the conference and located and invited participants, says that one of the exciting aspects of the conference was the emerging consensus among participants that they shared common concerns.

"Although some Native American food and nutrition organizations remain very skeptical about a continuing dialogue between themselves and

government," Ackerman says, "at least this conference was a beginning. People were able to exchange ideas and see what they had in common."

One area of major interest to both FNS and Native American participants was the concept of reservations leading and operating their own food assistance programs.

"FNS wants Native Americans to participate in running the food programs affecting them," says Teitelbaum. "We're interested in providing the help they want in solving their own problems."

FNS joined with other participants in making specific recommendations, including detailed suggestions on how to improve the WIC and Commodity Supplemental Food Programs. For instance, participants recommended that there be more promotion of breastfeeding in the WIC program. Participants also called for faster and more complete implementation of the food distribution program, and they suggested introducing into the program nutritious traditional foods produced by tribal enterprises. Another recommendation was that Native Americans develop as many of their own nutrition education materials as possible.

NIHB seeks local input

The National Indian Health Board will soon circulate these and other recommendations, along with audio cassette recordings of the conference's proceedings and discussions, to tribal organizations. These organizations in turn will play the recordings for groups within the tribes, and will send any evaluations or additional recommendations to NIHB. Once this process is completed—probably sometime this fall—NIHB will collate the information, publish the final recommendations, and pass them on to FNS and other interested agencies.

Using audio presentations as a way

to encourage public participation in making program policy serves two important purposes. First, it provides an inexpensive way for the participants to inform people at the local level about what took place at the conference. Second, it provides the opportunity for local people to comment on Federal food assistance programs and to suggest ways to revise or improve them. With this kind of information, FNS will be in a better position to anticipate the future needs of Native Americans.

How successful will this new dialogue between Native Americans and the Federal government prove to be? Are Native Americans one step closer to formulating policy for their own food programs?

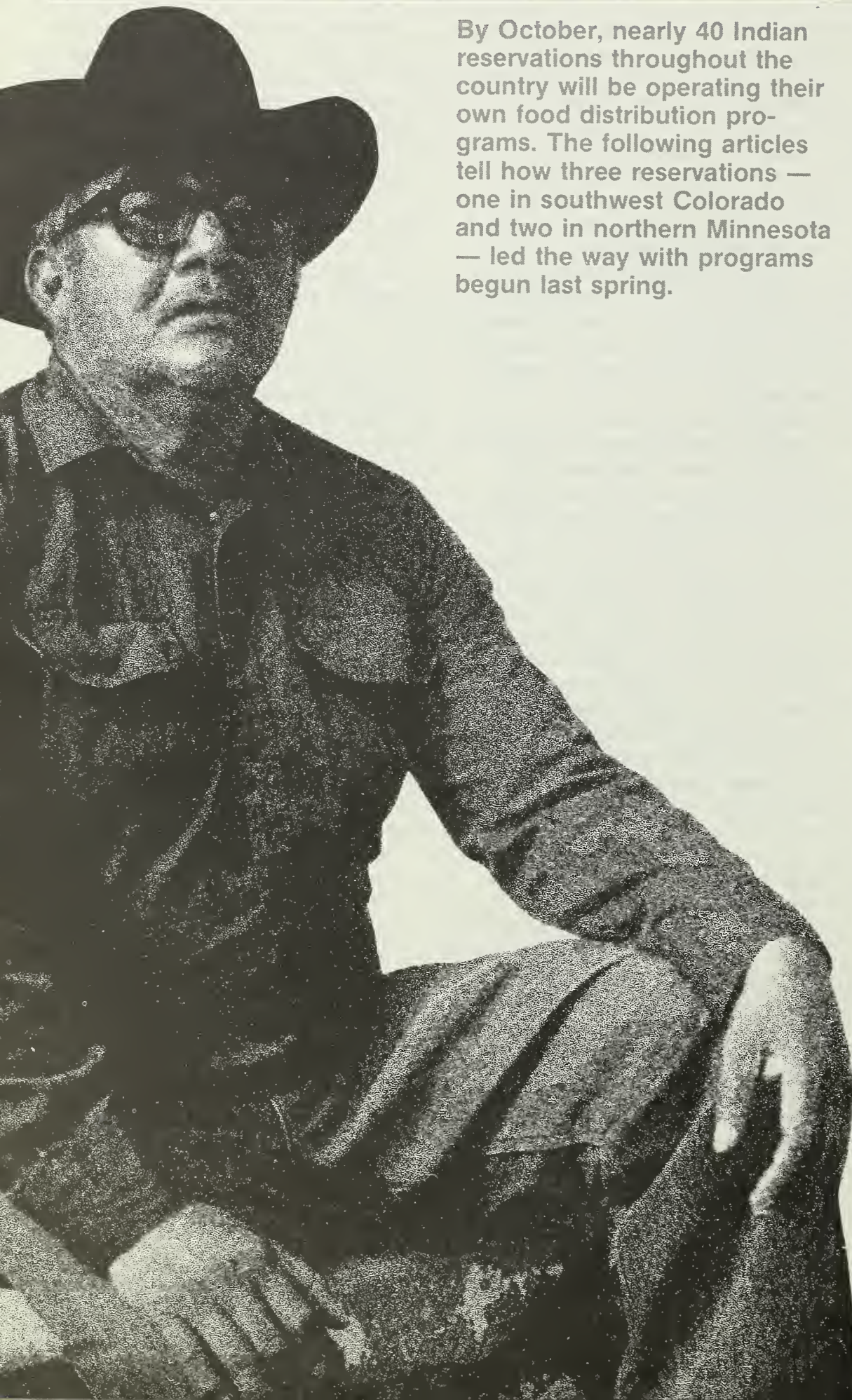
No one knows for sure. However, while many Native Americans continue to face serious health and nutrition problems, they are beginning to work together in seeking solutions.

by Bill Fedyna

For information on how to obtain the conference report and audio cassettes, write:

Alan Ackerman
Department of Food Science
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

Reservations Begin Their Own Food Distribution Programs



By October, nearly 40 Indian reservations throughout the country will be operating their own food distribution programs. The following articles tell how three reservations — one in southwest Colorado and two in northern Minnesota — led the way with programs begun last spring.

Ute Mountain Indians provide food help with dignity and autonomy

Inside a darkened doorway and down some stairs in the basement of the Community Food and Nutrition Building, a radio plays an old Chuck Berry tune. When it ends, the announcer comes on and talks for a minute in an Indian language. Then there is more music—this time a traditional chant. The chant ends and is followed by Waylon Jennings singing, “Mother, don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys . . .” A Navajo station in Albuquerque, we’re told.

This Monday, the fifth of May, is the first day of operation for the Food Distribution Program on the Ute Mountain Reservation in southwestern Colorado. Each phase of the process is functioning smoothly. Helen Tom and her assistants are busy certifying applicants with the double thoroughness that comes with new, unfamiliar procedures. They have certified 50 households already but have had to turn away 5 whose incomes were too high to qualify for the program.

In the warehouse, program supervisor Art Cuthair and his assistants Eugene Knight and Ted Weeks attend to their duties with similar deliberateness. The first room contains open stock shelves. Canned and packaged goods are stacked neatly, and the shelves sag a little under the weight. Rejects—dented and underweight cans, torn packages—are segregated on the top shelf.

In one corner is a large, new, refrigerated locker that contains a bulk supply of process American cheese. Butter should be coming soon, in the next shipment or two. In another corner stands a large desk, where Gene pours over constantly changing inventory lists. Across the room, the

radio continues with its farrago of sounds.

A door leads to a second store-room where unopened crates of commodities stand carefully stacked in separate groups, ready to be brought forward as required. USDA will be delivering 35,000 pounds of commodities to the Ute Mountain Reservation each month. They comprise a wide range of foods, and Art Cuthair is supplying participating households with as diverse a selection as possible at first to introduce them to some unfamiliar fare.

To minimize waste, he is also planning to have some samples available for testing. He expects some resistance, he says. One elderly woman has already complained about that weird stuff called spinach!

Each person in an eligible household, regardless of age, receives a complete commodity package every month. However, one may reduce the quantity of any item in the package, depending upon personal preference and rate of consumption. Within each of several food groups, a variety of choices is often available. Participants are free to select what they want up to the maximum quantity allowed.

A strong feature of the commodity program is that it encourages the use of items in *all* food groups, transcending the limits of the tribe's conventional eating habits, and promoting the possibility of a balanced and varied diet.

Problems are deeply rooted

To understand the Utes' health and nutrition problems, one must look into their past and present lives. Three hundred years ago, the ancestors of the people living on the reservation roamed the deserts and mountains of the Southwest in small nomadic bands. With the emergence of the reservation and the concept of property, they coalesced into a stationary tribe.

The Ute Mountain Reservation occupies 567,377 acres, mostly in the southwest corner of Colorado. A majority of the 1,400 tribal members live in or near the town of Towaoc (pronounce Toy-yak) at the foot of Sleeping Ute Mountain, just off Highway 666 south of Cortez. Nearly 300 other members live on tribal land in White Mesa, Utah.

In recent times the Utes have generated income from land claims

against the Federal government, oil and gas leases, and the operation of two main tribal businesses: a pottery and shirt factory. The wealth of the tribe is now in decline.

Consequently, like Indians on many reservations, the Utes have come to rely upon Federal assistance programs for certain needs. HUD provides houses, the Indian Health Service Clinic provides medical attention, CETA provides education and training programs, and the Department of Agriculture provides food.

As a result, the Utes find themselves increasingly involved with the outside world. As one observer close to the Utes put it, these people now live a dual existence. The material level is visible and addressed by the various Federal aid programs. The other level, one of tribal tradition and spirit, is invisible and closed to outsiders. These two levels become most apparent when they are in opposition. A case in point is the tribal recreation center—a new, large, corrugated metal building with a swimming pool, gym, and other facilities. This building was unknowingly erected on sacred ground, a burial site, and the Utes attribute its subsequent, mysterious rash of mechanical problems to a disturbed spirit.

To bridge the gap between their two worlds, the Ute Mountain Indians look to the progressive leadership of chairperson Judy Pinnecoose, the only woman voted to that position in



Noland May (opposite page) is one of 1,515 Ute Mountain Indians living on tribal land in Colorado and Utah. A World War II veteran with a bronze star, he speaks four languages.

The Community Food and Nutrition Building in Towaoc is the center for several food-related activities, including the new food distribution operation.



Left: Ted Weeks and Gene Knight stock shelves in the food distribution program's warehouse.

Right: The staff delivers a month's supply of food to the home of Ramona Wing. Sleeping Ute Mountain dominates the landscape.

the history of the tribe. Pinnecoose is a Mormon, the mother of two children, and the guardian of three more. She is an extremely serious and dedicated executive, and she has been instrumental in setting up three new planning organizations to work on community development, economic development, and development of energy and natural resources on the reservation. Except for a consultant on energy, these planning organizations consist mainly of members of the tribe.

Obstacles to self-sufficiency

The greatest obstacle to the tribe's self-sufficiency, at least in the production of food, is geography. Most of the tribe's land is not suitable for large-scale farming: the growing season is too short, the climate arid, and the terrain tending toward desert. The landscape visible to the south from the relatively high vantage of Towaoc is awesome, alien, and inhospitable.

Immense mesas with sheer cliffs and strange outlying rock formations appear to erupt from the desert floor. In the middle distance looms a great funnel-shaped monolith called Chimney Rock. Beyond that, about 35 miles away, an even more fantastic, jagged shape floats above the haze—Shiprock, New Mexico.

Except for some cattle and fruit trees, there is little agriculture to speak of. According to the tribe's own estimate, the reservation has 563 acres of irrigated farmland, and these are devoted primarily to hay and grain production for feeding cattle. With changes in the area's ecology and natural food supply, coupled with the shift away from a nomadic lifestyle, the Utes have lost their ability to provide all their own food.

The Utes' unemployment rate, education and income levels are fur-

ther reasons why Federal aid has become an indispensable factor in the tribe's subsistence. Nearly 50 percent of the potential working population is unemployed at any given time. The work force in the factories rotates constantly, and few tribal members venture off the reservation to seek outside employment.

Incomes among the Utes generally fall in the \$4,000-\$5,000 range. Tribal leaders estimate that the average level of education is sixth grade. The native Ute language is not written, so many cannot read or write: several certification forms for the Food Distribution Program have fingerprints for signatures. The impact of the employment problem registers visibly upon the new program: of the 200-plus households on the reservation, about 175 are expected to be eligible for commodities.

Poor nutrition threatens health

Among the Utes, symptoms of malnutrition and inadequate nutrition knowledge are evident. According to Ellen Melsness, a community health representative at the Indian Health Service Clinic in Towaoc, Utes tend to develop three prevalent health disorders: obesity, diabetes, and alcoholism. She said the first two are closely related and result partly from heredity and partly from improper nutrition.

The traditional Ute diet includes a variety of foods that fill the need for carbohydrates—beans, tortillas, potatoes, and bread. However, it is low in other foods, particularly fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats. A fairly new problem for the Utes is a proliferation of commercially processed foods, many of which are high in sugar or salt. Stores in Towaoc mainly offer canned, packaged, and prepared foods and snacks. They have no fresh vegetables or meats. And it is not uncommon for schoolchildren to grab a quick soda pop or candy bar for breakfast.

As Melsness observed, there is a



great need for nutrition education to help both young and old modify habits induced by tradition and popular trend. The Utes must now make choices where choices did not exist before, and many tribal leaders feel the Food Distribution Program will help them acquire the knowledge they need to choose wisely. People participating in the program can get instruction from a professional nutritionist on the reservation.

The causes and effects of alcohol abuse within the Ute culture are complicated. Among adult males age 18 and older, alcohol abuse is widespread. Over 30 percent of adult males are affected, and so, to a lesser extent, are women and even adolescents as young as age 13. General physiological effects caused by alcohol abuse are known: vitamin-B deficiencies, liver damage, protein starvation, and general malnutrition. Another more obvious relationship between alcohol and nutrition is that money spent on alcohol cannot be spent on food.

New program has advantages

In the last decade, the Food Stamp Program has improved conditions for the tribe. The program has been available to the Utes ever since its inception in this region. However, with the advent of the Food Distribution Program, many tribe members are turning to commodities. Some approach the new program tentatively, on a trial basis; others adopt it with conviction and a sense of relief.

The new food distribution plan does appear to have some advantages over food stamps for people living on a remote reservation. Though food stamps are accepted at grocery stores on the reservation, food selections are limited and prices are slightly higher than elsewhere. To find a regular supermarket, one must travel the 15 miles into Cortez. Many Utes do not have transportation readily available. As one commodity recipient explained, "I used to get food stamps, but I like this better. I don't have to try to find a ride into Cortez so often anymore." Off-reservation shopping, however, is still necessary

to obtain fresh meats and produce.

An important advantage of the Food Distribution Program is that the Utes operate it entirely themselves. They no longer have to go to county offices. The whole commodity distribution process, from certification to issuance, takes place on the reservation, and all transactions are between tribal members.

The program appears to be off to a good start on the Ute Mountain Reservation, but its success ultimately depends upon the way the Utes perceive it. It must compensate for what they overtly lack—food and the means of producing it. And, at the same time, it must help the Utes retain and reaffirm their own private sense of dignity and autonomy.

by David Lancaster

Residents of White Earth and Leech Lake welcome added choice and convenience

White Earth and Leech Lake Reservations in northern Minnesota were two of the first reservations to operate the Food Distribution Program themselves. They began issuing USDA commodities in March, leading the way for an additional 15 reservations in the Midwest and 23 others throughout the country, all scheduled to begin programs by October.

It's new for reservations to administer their own food distribution programs, but USDA foods are not new to Indian people. Many reservations, including White Earth and Leech Lake, had received USDA foods until 1974 when legislation stipulated that the Food Stamp Program be administered nationwide. While Indian reservations were exempt from the legislation and could continue with donated foods, most opted to switch to food stamps.

Between 1974 and March 1980, the Food Stamp Program was the only family nutrition program available to residents of Leech Lake and White Earth. Yet participation was low, even though unemployment problems made many families eligible. Approximately 60 percent of the 4,526 Indians living on or near Leech Lake Reservation and about 39 percent of the 3,500 Indians living on or near White Earth are unemployed.

Dave Reep, who directs the new Food Distribution Program at White Earth, attributes the unusually high unemployment rates to a slowdown in the construction and lumber industries. These industries are the largest employers of Indians living on the two reservations. "Construction is at an all-time low right now and lumbering has also stopped," he said. "The two

industries are very closely linked, and that is one of our problems."

Dave Reep and Suzy Roy, food distribution director at Leech Lake, estimate that 40 to 50 percent of the families now receiving USDA foods have not participated in the Food Stamp Program even though they would have qualified. "We get quite a few people who have not been on food stamps," Roy says. "We can't figure out how some of them lived on their incomes without getting food stamps."

Why weren't stamps used?

Roy gives several reasons for the low food stamp participation, which is linked to the particular problems of remote reservations. For one thing, until 2 years ago when neighboring counties set up satellite welfare offices on Leech Lake Reservation, many families had to travel more than 30 miles to the nearest county welfare office to apply for the program. Each month, they would have to make the trip again to pick up their food stamps.

The satellite sites have helped alleviate the transportation problem, Roy says, but many people still travel several miles to get their stamps. Welfare offices in the six counties serving Leech Lake and White Earth have begun issuing food stamps to participants by mail, and that, too, should help.

But practical problems are not the only reason for the low participation. Roy believes many Indians have not participated because they were uncomfortable about working with "outsiders." Applying for aid at an office run by county welfare employees

violated their strong sense of dignity and pride.

Indians who have participated in the Food Stamp Program have found that food stamps don't buy much in the small grocery stores on the reservation. "People living on the edge of Leech Lake Reservation, near Cass Lake, are able to do their shopping at the shopping centers off the reservation," Roy says. But in further, where "you find the really needy people," that's not possible.

"Each community is set up with a grocery store," she says. "The stores meet people's necessities, but they don't have the selection of larger stores, and people have to pay a lot more."

Many prefer commodities

Cara Mischke is one of many people on White Earth Reservation who are getting USDA foods. "Last winter for a while I got \$10 (a month) in food stamps," she says. "But I live in the country, and it was so hard to get out I gave up." She says she gets much more food through the Food Distribution Program than the Food Stamp Program, and applying for and receiving the commodities is much easier on the reservation.

Both reservations have set up food distribution offices in central locations. Applicants meet with eligibility certifiers who are supervised by the reservation's own program directors. As Dave Reep explains, applicants may be certified for 1 to 12 months, depending on their circumstances.

"If we anticipate that their eligibility won't change, we certify them for a full year," he says. "Most of the older people on Social Security and fixed incomes we certify for a year."

"We certify a few people for only a month," he adds, "but most can get commodities for 3 months before coming in to be recertified." Applicants who qualify usually receive the

A member of the Chippewa tribe, this woman was one of the first people to take part in Leech Lake Reservation's food distribution program.

commodities about 6 days after they apply.

Those eligible for donated foods include Indians living on or near the reservation, and people who are not Indians but who live on the reservation. As with the Food Stamp Program, people apply for and enroll in the program on a household basis. For example, a family of four and a group of four people living together are both four-person households. A person living alone is a one-person household. Qualifying households receive approximately 70 pounds of food per person each month.

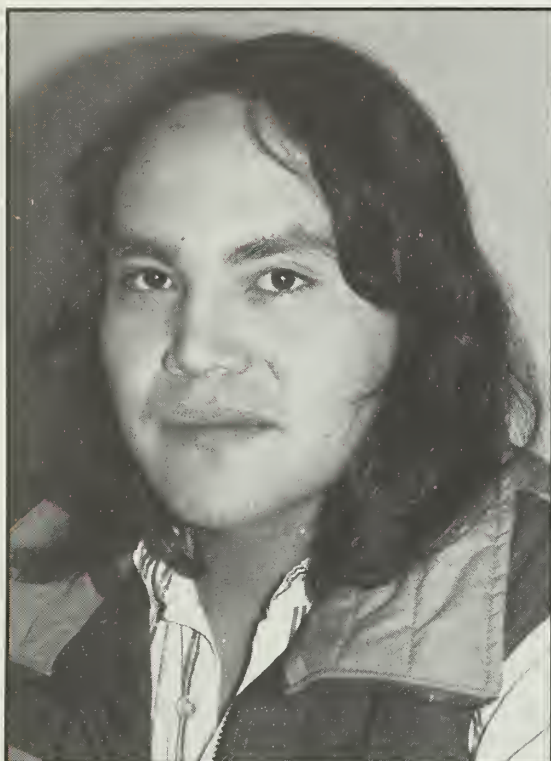
At Leech Lake, the staff distributes the foods from a central warehouse and from six community centers 1 day each month. If participants fail to pick up their foods at the community centers on distribution day, they may pick them up at the warehouse most other days of the month.

At White Earth, program directors distribute foods from a centrally located warehouse during the first 2 weeks of each month. So that everyone does not come on the same day, each household gets assigned a day to pick up their commodities. The staff also make deliveries to the homes of elderly and handicapped people who have no way to get the foods. Since some participants must travel up to 35 miles across the reservation to pick up their foods, Dave Reep hopes to begin issuing commodities from satellite sites in the near future.

Same amount for everyone

Under the Food Stamp Program, the amount of stamps a household gets is based on a graduated scale, depending on the number of people in the household and the total income, after deductions. One family of four may qualify for \$150 in food stamps per month, while another family may qualify for only \$35 in food stamps. With donated foods, all qualifying households get approximately the same amount of food for each





person. The amount does not vary with income. For example, all four-person households get roughly 280 pounds of food a month.

A sample food package for one person contains: 2 pounds of dry beans; 3 29-ounce cans of meat; ½-pound peanut butter or ½-pound peanuts; ¾-pound egg mix; 2 pounds of canned vegetarian beans; 2 pounds of dry milk; 2 pounds of process cheese; 8 14-½-ounce cans of evaporated milk; 1 pound each of rice, oats, corn meal or pasta; 14 ounces of farina or bulgar; 20 pounds of flour; 5 pounds of canned vegetables; ½-pound dehydrated instant potatoes; 5.7 pounds of canned fruit; 9.3 pounds of canned juice; 1 pound of butter; 3 pounds of shortening; and 1 pound of corn syrup.

"Have you ever seen so much food?" asks 74-year-old Frances Keahna, who receives commodities for herself and three grandchildren who live with her. Mrs. Keahna, who was issued one of the first commodity packages at White Earth, calls the food distribution program a "God-send." She says she could not afford to buy enough groceries on her limited income from Social Security and

Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Participants get to choose

Under the previous commodities program on reservations, participants did not have a choice of commodities available to them. Under the new program, they do.

For example, participants get three cans of meat and three cans of juice, but they have a choice of chicken or pork, and they can choose among five fruit juices—grape, apple, pineapple, tomato, and grapefruit. The program directors are conducting food preference surveys and are reordering USDA commodities in bulk on the basis of what participants request. For example, Reep says, "pork has been going, but people haven't taken much of the chicken. When we reorder, we'll order more of the pork."

Nutritionists on reservations throughout the country, as well as USDA nutritionists in Washington, D.C., approved the original selection of commodities.

Another feature of the new program on reservations is that people may apply for either the Food Distribution Program or the Food Stamp Program. They may not participate in both programs at the same time, but they have the option of switching from one to the other.

Reep estimates that 50 of the 1,150 eligible households at White Earth have switched to food stamps after getting commodities. Elderly people and participants who would receive only a few stamps tend to continue with donated foods, while

larger families who receive a lot of food stamps are more likely to switch back and forth.

A look at what's ahead

As of June 1980, approximately 4,000 people at White Earth and 1,600 people at Leech Lake Reservation were receiving commodities. Since then, at least two new households have applied for the Food Distribution Program at White Earth Reservation each day.

According to Dave Reep, the program is reaching twice the number of people the staff estimated in March. He attributes the original low estimate to census figures that were not current, the poor economy, and the slowdown of the construction industry near the reservation.

The staff at White Earth has concentrated on making eligible people aware of the program's availability. "We've had the best advertising—word of mouth," Reep says.



Above: Darwin Kingbird is a certification worker at Leech Lake. He speaks both English and Chippewa.

Right: Dave Reep (left) food distribution director at White Earth, goes over the list of commodities with a new participant.



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Right: Dave Reep (left) food distribution director at White Earth, goes over the list of commodities with a new participant.

Reep says he is extremely pleased with the Food Distribution Program but would like to see a few changes. He would like to see a wider variety of commodities available, especially meats. USDA officials say that program directors can choose from a list of about 45 different foods. They may order as many of the foods as they wish, depending on availability. Reep says he will order the majority of the available commodities to provide participants with a varied diet.

"The program has its problems, but by and large, it's an excellent one," Reep says. "When I think about what it means to the people, I feel good about my job."

He encourages tribal organizations interested in beginning food distribution programs to sit down and discuss possible problems and solutions with directors of existing programs.

by Mary Beth Miller

For more information, write:

Dave Reep
Star Route, Mahnomen, Minnesota 56557

Families learn to supplement and add variety to their diets

Poor nutrition is directly related to several of the leading causes of death among Indian people, according to Carolyn Ross, chief nutritionist at the Indian Health Service Clinic in Bemidji, Minnesota. Topping the list of health problems related to poor nutrition are diseases of the heart, cerebral vascular problems, cirrhosis of the liver, pneumonia and influenza, and diabetes.

Diabetes is three times more common among Indians in some tribes than the national average, and 97 percent of Indians who have diabetes are obese or have been obese at one time. Diabetes is not common among the younger Indian population—the majority develop the disease, maturity-onset diabetes, after age 40.

Mary Bull Bear, nutritionist at White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota, attributes some of the health problems to changing needs and a limited food supply. "The food system used to be feast or famine," she explains. "The only ones who could survive when food was scarce were those who could put on weight. They lived off their fat until they were able to get food again."

Scarcity is still a problem

Today, people on reservations don't gain weight to survive, but scarcity is still a problem. It's still extremely difficult to get the variety of foods needed for good health. "People frequently can't get fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats in the small stores on the reservation," Mary Bull Bear says, "and even if they could, the foods are too expensive. Prices have to be high because foods have to be shipped in the whole way."

For the last 5 months, Mary Bull Bear has been giving lessons on food

and nutrition to people taking part in the new Food Distribution Program operated by White Earth Reservation. Among the foods participants receive are protein-rich canned meats, dried beans, canned fruits and vegetables, and other items that have often been hard to obtain.

Mrs. Bull Bear has been testing and developing recipes using the commodities. At monthly classes held in a community center, she introduces a "recipe of the month" and invites participants to share their own recipes. She provides information on storing as well as preparing the foods.

While she feels some changes in the Food Distribution Program are necessary to improve the choices for people on special diets—particularly diabetics who cannot use foods canned in heavy syrups—she feels the program will be a useful tool for families needing to supplement and add variety to their diets.

USDA currently supplies unsweetened fruit juices for use in the Food Distribution Program. The Department is now arranging to also purchase canned fruits packed in either light syrup or fruit juices. For more information, write to: Darrel Gray, Director, Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

by Mary Beth Miller

...You and

There are more than 50 different kinds of nutrients. And all of them are important in helping your body grow, repair cells, and generally stay healthy.

Luckily, we don't have to try to remember the names of all of these nutrients. That's because nutrition experts have put all of

them into six basic groups: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and — believe it or not — water.

So let's take a closer look at the six groups of nutrients. We'll see how all of them work to keep you going.

Carbohydrates For Energy

What kind of food do you think of when you hear the word *carbohydrates*?

If you're like most people, you probably think of corn on the cob, or baked potatoes, or spaghetti, or breads. And you're right.

But what about celery or a peach or table sugar? Did you know these foods are also made of carbohydrates? It's true.

The fact is that there are three different kinds of carbohydrates:

- **Sugars** are called simple carbohydrates. They are found naturally in foods like fruit, milk and some vegetables like beets and peas. Refined sugars from sugar cane and sugar beets are added to foods like candy, soda, cakes and ice cream.

- **Starches**, which are one type of complex carbohydrates, are found in foods like bread, potatoes, rice, and vegetables.

- And **fiber**, which is also a complex carbohydrate, is found in the walls of plant cells, the tough, structural parts of plants, like the stringy part of celery or the bran of wheat and other cereals. And even though humans can't digest fiber, it plays an important role. It helps move the other food through the body, and then helps the body get rid of wastes left over from digestion. Some people also think that fiber helps you feel full without eating too many calories and that it helps you to keep healthy and well.

But of the three kinds of carbohydrates, starches have been the main part of people's diets for as far back as anyone can re-

member. And that's true even today. In Asia, for example, rice is the main part of every meal.

Carbohydrates are your main source of energy. Here's how that works.

As carbohydrates enter your body, your body changes the starches and sugar to *glucose*. Glucose is like gasoline for a car. It provides fuel for your cells.

This fuel burns in the cell. And even though it doesn't produce a flame, it does produce energy and heat. (That's one reason why your body temperature is normally 98.6°F.)

And the cells use the energy along with proteins, vitamins and minerals to repair themselves, make new cells, and carry out their work.

Whenever you eat more carbohydrates than your body needs, two things happen. A little of that extra glucose gets changed into another substance. This is called *glycogen*. Your body stores the glycogen for when you need extra energy—like when you decide to race your brother to the corner grocery store. Your body then changes the glycogen back into glucose so that it can send it to the cells to use for energy. (You only have about one pound of glycogen in storage at any one time.)

But most of the extra glucose from the food you eat gets changed into *fat*. Your body stores fat almost everywhere. And when you really need it, the body can change that fat back into energy. But most of us get enough food energy, and carrying around a lot of extra fat is not too healthy.

Nutrients



Fats: A Little Goes A Long Way

Fats are the most compact source of energy. One way we measure energy is by the number of calories. And an ounce of fat, for instance, has more than twice the number of calories as an ounce of either proteins or carbohydrates.

Fat does more than provide calories. It carries four important vitamins throughout your body. They are called the “fat-soluble” vitamins. (We’ll talk about them later.) But there are problems with fat. Many scientists think Americans eat too much fat.

First, fat is fattening. So if you eat a lot of fatty foods—like potato chips, french fries, fatty meats, frosted cakes and cream pies—you may be getting more calories

than you need for energy. And you can guess what happens then! You get fat!

Secondly, scientists think that eating too much fat over a lifetime is linked to some very serious diseases that you may get as you grow older—like heart disease, strokes, some kinds of cancer and high blood pressure. Maybe you know somebody who has these problems.

Fats are found in such foods as whole milk, cheese, nuts and seeds, and meats. Fats are also found in the skin of poultry, certain fatty fish, like the bluefish or mackerel, and avocados and olives. But fats are also often added to prepared foods, such as fried foods, cakes, candies, cookies, frosting, gravies, sauces, and salad dressings.

Protein: Your Body’s Building Blocks

Nearly everything in your body is made up of *protein*. This includes your hair, bones, muscles, teeth—even your brain.

The protein you eat gets broken down and built back up into all these parts of your body. You need protein to build cells and to repair them. As much as 3 to 5 percent of the protein in your body is replaced each day. Red blood cells live for only about 120 days. Cells in the lining of your small intestine get worn out in a few days and have to be replaced . . .

There are certain times of life when you need extra protein—like now when you are growing, or when you’re recovering from injury. When you get older, and as your growth slows, you will need less protein.

What foods have protein? Most people think first of meat, fish and chicken. But milk, nuts, cheese, peanut butter, eggs, beans, and grains also have protein . . .

Proteins are not all alike. They vary in the number of building blocks they have for your cells to use. Therefore, you should eat a variety of protein foods in order to keep your cells growing and working right.

Most people in the world get their proteins from two or more sources.

Mexican people, for example, eat red beans and corn meal tortillas; Chinese people soybean cakes and rice; Arabic people chick peas and cracked wheat. You [may] eat peanut butter sandwiches, for example, or cereal and milk, or macaroni and cheese. These foods not only taste good together, they work together for you in your body.

Your muscles are made of protein. But you won’t build stronger or bigger muscles just by eating foods that are high in protein. Exercise and food together build muscles. And if you eat a lot of extra protein without exercising, that protein will be turned into fat. And who needs that?

Vitamins: For Good Health

Vitamins are very tricky chemicals. They don't give us energy. But we do need them in the right amounts for our cells to do their work.

Some vitamins help to make blood cells, hormones, and the regulating substances you need all the time. Other vitamins help you use other nutrients. Most of us get all the vitamins we need from our food nowadays, because we eat a variety of food.

There are about 13 vitamins that are absolutely necessary for good health. Four are called fat-soluble vitamins because—you guessed it—they dissolve in fat. These are

Vitamin A

A

Needed for good vision, healthy skin, strong bones, and wound healing.

Found in yellow, orange, and green vegetables; yellow fruits; and in the fat of animal products like fish, milk, eggs, and liver.

B Vitamins

B

Needed for using protein, fat, carbohydrates; for keeping eyes, skin, and mouth healthy; for development work of the brain; and for the nervous system.

Found in many foods such as whole grain and enriched cereals and breads, meats and beans.

Vitamin C

C

Needed for wound healing; for development of blood vessels, bones, teeth, and other tissues; and for minerals to be used by the body.

Found in food like citrus fruits, melons, berries, leafy green vegetables, broccoli, cabbage, and spinach.

vitamins A, D, E, and K. They are digested and absorbed with the help of fats from the diet.

These vitamins can be stored in your body for long periods of time, mostly in fatty tissue and in the liver. Because they can be stored for long periods, you don't need to eat foods every day containing these vitamins.

Nine other vitamins are called water-soluble. They include eight B vitamins, and vitamin C. These vitamins aren't stored in your body very long, so you need to eat foods that are good sources of these vitamins every day.

Now let's take a closer look at vitamins. We'll see what they are needed for, and where you get them.

Vitamin D

D

Needed for using calcium and phosphorus to build strong bones and teeth. It's a vitamin your skin produces when getting sunshine.

Found in fatty fish, liver, eggs, butter; added to most milk.

Vitamin E

E

Helps preserve the cell tissues.

It is found in a wide variety of foods, and most people get enough.

Vegetable oils and whole grain cereals are especially rich sources.

Vitamin K

K

Needed for normal blood clotting.

Found in dark green leafy vegetables; peas, cauliflower, and in whole grains.

It's also made in our bodies.

Minerals: For Teeth, Bones and Health

Minerals are essential to your health, even though you need only small amounts of each.

The 20 known minerals can be divided into four groups:

1. Minerals which are part of bones; calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and fluorine.
2. Minerals that regulate body fluids: sodium, potassium and chlorine.
3. Minerals that are needed to make special materials the cells need to do their work: iron and iodine.
4. Trace elements, or minerals, needed in tiny amounts — traces. They trigger chemical reactions in the body that are essential for good health.

1. Bone Minerals

Bone minerals: calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and fluorine.

Calcium is the mineral we need the most. Calcium makes bones and teeth strong and sturdy and is found in milk products.

Magnesium helps bones and muscles do their work, and helps turn food into energy. It also helps the body use certain vitamins. You get this mineral in nuts, seeds, dark green vegetables, and whole grain products.

Phosphorus works with calcium in making bone and teeth. Phosphorus is very plentiful in a typical American diet.

Fluorine is also important for strong bones and teeth it helps prevent cavities. It

is found in seafood and in some plants. But many of us get our supply from the fluorine added to drinking water.

2. Fluid Regulating Minerals: These minerals include sodium, potassium, and chlorine:

More than half your body is water. And these minerals help keep the right amounts of water inside the cells — while keeping the rest out.

3. Minerals that make materials: These minerals include iron, iodine, and sulfur:

Iron carries oxygen in your blood. The best sources of iron are meats (especially liver). But foods from some plants — like beans, green leafy vegetables, and grains — are good sources of iron, especially when eaten along with foods rich in vitamin C. An example is drinking some orange juice with your whole wheat toast in the morning. The vitamin C helps your body absorb iron better.

Iodine is needed to make a hormone produced by the thyroid gland, which controls growth. Many years ago people worried about getting a disease called goiter, because they didn't get enough iodine. but now we don't worry because iodine is added to salt.

4. Trace Elements

There are more than 17 trace minerals. Zinc and copper are two examples.

Zinc helps you grow, taste, make proteins, and heal wounds. You get zinc in whole grain bread and cereals, beans, meats, shellfish, eggs, and in many more foods.

Copper, along with iron, is important for healthy red blood cells. It also helps build muscles. Good sources are fish and meats, as well as nuts, raisins, oils, and grains.

Water: For Life

Water? You probably didn't even think it was food at all. But it is. And it's a nutrient, too.

Water is the most important food of all. You can survive for weeks without a single bite of food. But you can only live for a few days without water.

Your body is more than half water. Your blood, for instance, is 90 percent water. Your brain is 75 percent water. And there is water in every one of your cells.

Water carries nutrients to all your cells. It carries waste away. It keeps your body at just the right temperature.

You lose about 2½ quarts of water a day. Some is lost as urine. Some as perspiration. Some when you breathe.

But water is usually easy to replace. Every time you eat food, you eat water, and water is a by-product of the cells' work.

Can you think of foods that contain a lot of water? You probably guessed tomatoes, oranges, and watermelon. But do you know that bread is more than one-third water? Meat is more than half water.

And, of course, milk and juice are nearly all water — plus natural flavoring and nutrients. So those are the nutrients — carbohydrates, protein, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water. They come from the food you eat and they make you what you are. □

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OF
AGRICULTURE
AGR 101



THIRD CLASS BLK. RT.
PERMIT NUMBER .005-5



Published six times a year by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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Yearly subscription: \$6.50 domestic, \$8.15 foreign. Single copies: \$1.50 domestic, \$1.90 foreign. Send subscription orders to: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. The use of funds for printing this publication was approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through September 30, 1980.

Prints of photos may be obtained from Photo Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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